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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000637

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONAL CONVENTION: CENTER OF THE REGIME'S
PTOLEMAIC UNIVERSE

REF: A. RANGOON 612 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). RANGOON 601

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Burmese regime's National Convention has thus far revealed little more than instructions and warnings to its hand-picked delegates who will have no opportunity to reconsider pre-drafted components of a new constitution. It is clear that the SPDC has reconvened the Convention simply to rubber stamp a new constitution as the first step toward a military-controlled "disciplined democracy." The generals seem to view the boycott by the NLD and the UNA as a mere irritant, given an attending cast of delegates that will bless the entire process. Although the more restive cease-fire groups in attendance could create some minor drama, the SPDC has no intention of letting this version of the National Convention spin out of its control. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The SPDC's National Convention nears completion of its first week in session and GOB authorities, as anticipated, show no signs of allowing open debate or reconsideration of pre-drafted components for a new constitution. The new constitution, once "approved" by the 1,000-plus hand-picked delegates, will allow the armed forces to retain a preeminent role in the governance of Burma.

[1](#)3. (U) According to official reports, 1,076 delegates are in attendance at the Convention, or as the GOB puts it, "98.9 percent of the 1,088 (registered) delegates." Although the regime categorizes over 60 percent of the delegates as representatives of Burma's ethnic nationalities, many of these pro-regime delegates are identified as members of obscure social organizations and unknown political splinter groups (e.g., the "KNPP Dragon Group," the "Homein Region Welfare and Development Group," the "Rahkine Group of the Burma Communist Party," etc.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) The regime has emphasized that the delegates represent a broad spectrum of Burmese society; however, only 25 delegates represent political parties and a mere 12 delegates are members-elect of Parliament, from among the 485 MPs elected in 1990 (Note: Among the MPs-elect in attendance at the Convention, six are former NLD members who were dismissed from the party in the 1990s. End note.) One elderly delegate, from the pro-regime Union Karen League, is unable to walk or to speak and was reportedly hospitalized upon arrival at an on-site medical facility.

[1](#)5. (SBU) An unknown number of delegates at the Convention, though likely the majority according to Embassy sources, are civil servants and members of the SPDC's mass-member organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). In fact, many local Burmese deride the Convention as nothing more than a mass rally of the USDA and, in a play on words in the Burmese language, refer to the event as the "Cheat the Nation Convention."

[1](#)6. (U) State-controlled media have devoted considerable print and air time to "coverage" of the National Convention which, for the first week, has consisted mostly of a series of instructions and warnings for delegates regarding their role in the proceedings. In the opening days, Minister for Information Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan, in his capacity as Secretary of the Convention's Convening Commission, spelled

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out a series of "procedures" for delegates, including (exactly as published):

--Whenever entering or going out of the meeting hall, all are to bow to the State flag;

--Do not talk about the interests of organizations and persons that are not in the framework of law;

--A delegate is to discuss the topics in line with the proposal paper sent (and approved) in advance and not to discuss the topics that are not included in the paper;

--When the plenary meeting or the meeting of the delegate groups are in progress, the delegates are not allowed to walk out individually or in groups;

--Delegates are advised to put on suitable clothes, to avoid having bath at an unreasonable time and eat junk food.

--These regulations are prescribed not for repression but for the interest of the national races and the delegates.

17. (U) Lt General Thein Sein, the junta's fifth-ranking member and chairman of the Convening Commission, addressed the delegates with a sober message that the 1993-1996 National Convention had "already formulated" the basis for a State Constitution and informed the delegates that their present, and unique, duty was to ensure "the emergence of a discipline-flourishing democracy."

18. (C) Thein Sein's message struck a discordant note with the main cease-fire groups in attendance at the Convention, many of whom view the drafting of a new constitution as their only opportunity to codify the autonomy they enjoy on most administrative, security, and economic matters. In addition to the grievances expressed by a loose coalition of eight major cease-fire groups, expressed via letter to Prime Minister Khin Nyunt on May 12 (ref B), two leading Kachin cease-fire groups (the KIO and the NKA-K) also wrote to the PM on May 16 urging the SPDC to make accommodations allowing the NLD to participate, observing that a failed Convention would be an "ugly blemish on Burma's history."

19. (C) Comment: There is no question that the SPDC has reconvened the National Convention to rubber stamp a pre-drafted constitution as the first step toward a "disciplined democracy." To the regime, the NLD and the UNA boycott (ref A) is apparently a mere irritant to this showcase event, given the generals' ability to assemble, in some cases with the help of threats and intimidation, a cast of delegates that will bless the entire process. Although the cease-fire groups could create some drama through further public airing of their grievances, or even an eventual walk-out, such actions are unlikely to deter the SPDC, which has no intention of letting this version of the National Convention spin out of its control. End Comment.
Martinez